

**Veteran's Memorial Park Renovation Committee
Minutes
June 5, 2013**

Present:

Councilman Joseph Bibisi
Councilman Philip J. Pessina
Councilman Robert P. Santangelo
Robert Blanchard
Phil Cacciola
Carl R. Chisem
Augie Defrance
Diane Deluzio
John Hall
Jane Harris
Susan Martucci
Betsy Morgan
Ron Organek
Nancy Rousselle
Daniel Ryan

City Staff & Engineering Consultants

William Russo - Public Works Director & Staff to Committee
Tina Gomes – Finance Department
Debbie Stanley - Acting Director of Parks & Recreation
Alan Nafis – Weston & Sampson
Cheri Ruane – Weston & Sampson
Brandon Riley – Weston & Sampson
Sara Weier – Weston & Sampson

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TOWN CLERK
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Meeting Called to Order:

Councilman Robert Santangelo called the meeting to order at 7 p.m.

Members present at the meeting introduced themselves for the record.

Public Hearing:

Councilman Santangelo opened the public hearing portion of the meeting.

- Ron Organek informed the Committee that the name of 'Veteran's Memorial Park' is misleading and should be more along the lines of World War II Memorial Veteran's Park. He reported that In 1945, 30 people attending a meeting stated unanimously that Middletown should have a living memorial of Veteran's serving in the forces during WWII in the form of a swimming pool, public park or recreation building which will later be left for decision by the permanent committee. The original park was intended to be along the Connecticut River front. Mr. Organek also provided copies of historical information he had on the background of Veteran's Memorial Park.

- Sue Martucci stated that current plans called for two phases towards completion of the Memorial. Phase 1 includes tree planting with the installation of plaques as well as addressing the pond area. Phase 2 would take place in 2014 with the walk way, monuments, entrance sign, etc.
- John Hall attended the meeting as a representative of the non-profit organization Jonah Center for Earth & Art as well as the Complete Streets Committee. The Jonah Center has a great advocacy for protecting the Coginchaug River and considering the great ecosystem. He has gone to several Planning & Zoning hearings to influence the repaving of Palmer Field parking lot above Bernie O'Rourke Drive to protect the Coginchaug River. His organization wanted a smaller paved area and a larger permeable parking lot. The Jonah Center members have gone to Public Works Commission meetings to speak about the impact from depositing snow at Veteran's Park. He suggested that the City put up berms or barriers so when the snow melts, the salts and the sediment don't run straight into the Coginchaug River. Mr. Hall also recommended against the installation of a kayak launch in the Park because the river downstream is covered with fallen trees, and it would be problematic. Accessibility to the park raises concern to the Complete Streets Committee since they are trying to promote cycling and walking as a means of transportation, and the park is in a key area to open up accessibility. Washington Street and Newfield Street are huge barriers when trying to walk or cycle from the north part of town to the south part of town.

Public Hearing Closed:

- Public Hearing was closed at 7:22 p.m.

Election of Vice Chair:

- Dan Ryan made a motion for Councilman Robert P. Santangelo to serve as Vice Chairman of the Veteran's Park Committee. The motion was seconded by Councilman Joseph Bibisi. Councilman Philip Pessina made a motion to close the nomination, seconded by Elizabeth Morgan. Councilman Santangelo was unanimously approved as Vice Chairman of the Committee.

Discussion of Vision for Park

- Preliminary sketches of park were distributed showing initial ideas for the park design.
- Cheri Ruane gave a thorough presentation on the parks that Weston & Sampson has been involved in designing and pointed out how various activities have been blended together to better serve the recreation needs of the community.
- Phil Cacciola stated that baseball fields and softball fields don't follow the theme of a Veteran's Memorial Park. A more solemn place is necessary for the Military Museum and Trees of Honor. All active sports fields should be south of the Coginchaug River. Mr. Cacciola would like to see the Military Museum and Trees of Honor close together and connected with a walk way or path.
- Councilman Pessina stated that at one point, the Park had swimming, basketball courts and archery which drew many people to the location.

- Bob Santangelo suggested a large multi-use pavilion for summer concerts and children's circuses would help with expanding city arts on many levels. The Pavilion could also be used in the winter if skating were provided. He also stated that although most parks don't have dog parks inside them, there are over 3000 dogs registered in the City of Middletown. A dog park would be a good investment if tucked back in the woods by the shade for dogs to gain a natural feeling. The dog park and the pool should be kept separate from each other. Military Museum and Veteran's Trees of Honor should also be kept separate due to possible noise complaints.
- Jane Harris explained that the Trees of Honor are going to be planted in accordance to soil type. The northern corner of the park is a different grade of soil and south of the road is made up of steep topography. Ms. Evans also suggested using the Pavilion for a Farmer's Market.
- August DeFrance inquired about the location of the bus loading/unloading area so that it will be closer to the Military Museum. He also inquired about restroom facilities in this area. It was confirmed that water and sewer facilities would be considered prior to the construction of roads.
- Weston & Sampson confirmed that they will prepare an Opportunities and Constraints Report which may help narrow what can and can't be done on the site by eliminating steep slopes, wetland resource areas and river setbacks.
- James Sipperly, Environmental Resource Specialist for the City, stated that the Inlands Wetlands Commission unanimously agreed that the park did not require a permit application, and they liked the idea that the pond is going to be in the planned location. The Commissions' only concern was fencing around the four foot deep pond considering all of the children that will be near the pond. The pond has to be at least four feet deep due to keeping the water moving and cooled off to prevent algae from developing.
- The question arose as to whether or not the pond could be used as a skating rink. Ms. Ruane explained that it is hard to get substantial ice thickness due to the warm winters that we have been having. If the pond freezes to a suitable depth, it is possible to skate on it keeping in mind the risks involved. Splash pads can also be created for winter time skating use.
- Pat Evans would like to use the pavilion during warmer weather for a Farmer's Market.
- Ms. Raune advised that the Museum should have vehicular access close to it while making sure that the heart of the park will not be covered with pavement.
- Before any decisions are made, a meeting with the general public will be held on August 28, 2013, in the Council Chambers at 7 p.m.
- A suggestion was made by Robert Blanchard to utilize Google Groups so that everyone can have access to feedback and documents and to keep everyone involved with the committee's actions. The Public Works Director said he would be looking into the capability of staff to do this.
 - Elizabeth Morgan is worried about not having a central attraction that defines and draws people to the park. She suggested a more focused or specialized approach for the park should be considered such as the road being lit up or decorated according to the seasons to attract and carry people through the park. Ms. Morgan also recommended walking paths should lead to

nature projects, activities and outdoor classrooms so the paths have more of a purpose or attraction.

- Ms. Ruane advised that Weston & Sampson would like to create a cohesive plan towards a unified system to organize the site.
- Susan Martucci stated that she is looking to coordinate Wreaths Across America in the Veteran's Park.

Meeting Adjourned

- Meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:45 p.m.